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FDLE Arrests Paid Petition Circulator for Personal Identification Fraud

Marion County, FL. August 29 - Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) arrested Maria Guadalupe Bautista, 24, of Ocala, on 16 counts of fraudulent use of personal identification information. Bautista was a paid petition circulator. Investigators with Office of the State Attorney, Fifth Judicial Circuit and the Alachua County Sheriff's Office assisted in the case.

The case began in November of 2021 when FDLE agents met with the Marion County Supervisor of Elections (SOE) about a complaint of widespread fraud related to a constitutional amendment for the Limited Authorization of Casino Gaming. The SOE staff identified 767 petition forms suspected of being forged. Bautista turned in 191 of the suspected fraudulent forms.

The investigation confirmed that 16 petitions submitted by Bautista contained fraudulent signatures. Two of the 16 forged petitions she submitted to the SOE were for individuals that were deceased prior to the date on the signed forms.

Bautista was booked into the Marion County Jail today and is being held on a \$80,000 bond. The case will be prosecuted by the State Attorney's Office, Fifth Judicial Circuit.

"Supervisors of Elections take fraud seriously and are committed to protecting your vote," said Supervisor Wilcox. "Throughout the year, our staff verifies thousands of candidate and initiative petitions signed by Marion County voters and validates the signature on each petition."

The investigation remains active.

For Further Information Contact:
FDLE Office of Public Information
(850) 410-7001

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